

Cadets learn teamwork

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As the cold wind howls across the barren trees and knee-high scrub grass, several teen-age cadets hike from one obstacle to the next.

Dressed in their parents ill-fitting uniforms, the ragtag team, with helmets askew, discuss the problems and possibilities of each hurdle.

This was the scene as six RAF Lakenheath High School Junior ROTC cadets participated in Exercise Student Stretch March 14 through Sunday. The exercise, which was created by the British Officers Training Corps, teaches non-military-trained people about teamwork and communication, and fosters goodwill between the British and American communities.

This is the first time Americans from Lakenheath have competed in the annual event, which is held in Cambridge and at Basingbourne Barracks, the Royal Army's equivalent to Lackland AFB, Texas.

Lakenheath came in fifth during the event, which saw six teams from Cambridge University, University of East Anglia, and Anglia Polytechnic University.

The Lakenheath team members were: Byron Clark, commander; Robert Shields, commander's assistant; Brad Wolfe, first sergeant; Garry Wedlow, logistics; Tawnya Russell, finance; and Pernell Cobbs. All are seniors except Wolfe, who is a junior and Cobbs, who is a sophomore.

The team had fewer people and was younger than the other participants.

We had a great time during the exercise, Clark said. "But it was a lack of manpower, not knowledge that held us back. We hung in there and did our best."

The students began training at 6 p.m. March 14 at the training corps center in Cambridge. There, they received briefings about what they were going to accomplish and what

to expect in the upcoming days.

"Part of what the students learn includes putting up shelters, cooking for themselves and how to look after each other," said Lt. Col. Nicholas Beswick, the officers training corps commandant. "Each team has one officer cadet as a guide, but the leadership comes from within the team."

Saturday morning, the students were taken to the assault course at Basingbourne Barracks, the Royal Army's equivalent to Lackland AFB, Texas. The assault course is similar to the Air Force confidence course.

"The students confront eight obstacles that teach them teamwork," Beswick said. "They have 40 minutes to complete each one."

One obstacle was a 12-foot high building with a mined roof. The cadets had to use different-length boards to get each other over the building without touching the roof. As an added touch, they also had to retrieve a key from the center of the building. The key was in a bucket that was suspended on a string and hanging under the roof.

The evening exercises consisted of a scenario where the students were workers at an embassy in a country where law and order has broken down. Their goal is to leave the country safely. To do this, they had to keep watch all night and use evasion tactics when the enemy moved in.

The following morning, after spending the night evading the enemy to reach safety, the students had a competition involving physical and mental skills.

"It was tiring," said Clark. "There were times I just wanted to quit. My whole body hurt from all the work we did."

Even with tired, aching bodies and weary minds, the cadets thought it was a good experience and enjoyed their time in the field.

"When the enemy came and we had to duck and dodge, that was cool," Cobbs said. "I learned to give and listen to others' opinions and how to be a leader and a follower.

"But one of the most important things I learned was to look at a problem from many different angles, not just one."

Escaping the enemy was the best part of the weekend, according to Russell. The team managed to stay calm and head to their next point successfully.

"We had no problems and even tried to warn the other group over the radio," she said. "But we realized that the enemy also could hear what we were saying, so we didn't use it any more."

"(The exercise helped) teach the cadets teamwork and how to communicate with each other," said Lt. Col. Jeff Britton, JROTC commander. It also gave them more self confidence, which they'll keep forever, he said.



Brad Wolfe explains obstacle procedures to the rest of the Lakenheath team.



Tawnya Russell climbs a rope to conquer an obstacle.